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COLCHESTER BOARD OF EDUCATION
Budget Workshop #1

Tuesday, February 24, 2026
6:00 PM
William J. Johnston Middle School Black Box Theatre

MINUTES

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT : Chair Stefanie Tracey-Calash, Vice-Chair Christopher Rivers, Secretary Cody McNeely, Cari Duigou, Gussie Gilberti, Michelle Millington and Nancy Nelson

ADMINISTRATION PRESENT : Superintendent Daniel P. Sullivan, III, Assistant Superintendent Jessica L. Kuckel, Director of Pupil Services Eve Hurley, Assistant Director of Pupil Services Rebecca Tedesco, Bacon Academy (BA) Principal Amy Begué, BA Assistant Principal Jennifer Martin, BA Assistant Principal Michael Mal, William J Johnston Middle School (WJJMS) Principal Meghan Amado, WJJMS Assistant Principal Bonnie McAneny, Jack Jackter Intermediate School (JJIS) Principal Stacy Ewings, JJIS Associate Principal Melissa Cyr, Colchester Elementary School (CES) Principal Judy O'Meara, CES Assistant Principal Kelly Bahre.

OTHERS PRESENT : Director of Finance and Operations Rachel Linkkila, Instructional Technology Coordinator Barbara Johnson, Executive Assistant to the Superintendent Alyssa Butova, Human Resources Coordinator Pauline Goetz, Director of Educational Operations Andrew Barillari, Student Board Member Toheed Usman.

1. MEETING OPENING

1.1. Call to Order
S.Tracey-Calash called the meeting to order at 6:01 PM

1.2 Roll Call
All Board Members present for roll call except G.Gilberti

1.3 Pledge of Allegiance

G.Gilberti arrived at 6:02 PM

2. PRIORITY DISCUSSION

2.1. Presentation from Administrative Team on Following Budgets: JJIS, WJJMS and CES
Assistant Superintendent Kuckel gave an overview of the district goals and performance. Principals O'Meara, Ewings and Amado gave their respective schools' projections, priorities and progress.

2.2. Board Q&A on Following Budgets: JJIS, WJJMS and CES

- C.Duigo asked what WINN stood for at WJ. It was stated that it stands for "What I Need Now" and it is when students can receive extra support.
- M.Millington asked about the HOT Schools and the loss of the Drama Coach at JJIS. It was stated that they did not lose a person, just shifted the work and who will be doing it. Previously there was an outside coach and now that has shifted to an in-house person.
- M.Millington asked why there was an increase in electricity usage for only two of the four schools. It was stated that there were new bids for power with new rates. The contract we were in was for five years and has expired
- G.Gilberti asked about the increase in nursing staff. It was explained that a second school-day nurse has been added at each school. The budget book reflects line items for each individual nurse, and staffing is scheduled in shifts. In some cases, the second nurse may work a split shift. Any discrepancies between line items are due to the number of shifts each nurse works at a given school.
- N.Nelson asked about the math books and textbooks at JJIS. This year's budget includes the purchase of one teacher manual, as well as manipulatives and consumable materials. Because students write directly in the materials as workbooks, they must be replaced annually.
- S.Tracey-Calash asked about the SRBI paraeducator position at JJIS on page 22, line 50, noting it was not included. It was clarified that the position was not cut but reallocated to special education based on student needs.
- C.Rivers asked about the Kenwood radios for JJIS listed on page 23, line 100. The radios are used for staff communication during recess, extended recess, and special programs. Many of the current radios are no longer functioning properly.
- C.Rivers asked about the "Really Good Stuff" line item on page 23 at JJIS. This refers to language arts instructional materials and supplies.
- C.McNeely asked about the reallocation of funds for Eureka Math and Great Minds at JJIS on page 23, line 71. It was confirmed that funds were reallocated from instructional supplies to textbooks. He also asked whether professional development for 2025-2026 would support Eureka Math, which it will. When asked whether additional professional development is needed, it was noted that the math coach will assume some responsibility for supporting teachers. C.McNeely asked whether the math coach is a staff member and whether the district could operate without instructional coaches. It was confirmed that the math coach is a staff member. At CES, JJIS and WJ, coaches co-teach and push into classrooms, help develop support lessons, analyze data, and collaborate with teachers to address student needs.
- S.Tracey-Calash reviewed staffing and student enrollment projections and related reallocations. Although enrollment is down in third grade, it is up in fifth grade, resulting in no additional staffing needs at JJIS. WJ is not requesting any new staff additions, which currently has eight content teams, nine applied academic sections, and three world language sections. At CES, kindergarten will increase to 11 teachers.
- N.Nelson asked whether the Associate Principal position at JJIS had decreased. It was clarified that a portion of the salary is funded through Title I.
- S.Tracey-Calash asked about page 27, line 48, regarding the 403(b) contribution at WJ. This is a contractual contribution for the principal and assistant principal and is divided over 24 pay periods. She also asked about stipends on page 27, line 49. These stipends at WJ are contractual and include advisors, directors, clubs, sports, specialists, team leaders, and technology integration roles. There is an additional stipend this year for a robotics advisor. The stipends are structured in different tiers according to the teachers' contract.
- S.Tracey-Calash asked about the robotics program at JJIS. It was stated that many

robotics students are currently in fifth grade and will be moving to WJ. At this time, there is only a need for one robotics team. If participation increases, a second advisor will be added. An interest survey will be sent in the spring to fourth and third grade students to assess future participation.

- N.Nelson asked how decisions are made regarding software licensing and support costs, and whether they are included in individual school budgets or the IT budget. If the software is used only by one school, the cost is included in that school's budget. If it is used by more than one school or location, it is included in the IT budget to secure optimal pricing, manage renewals, and ensure compliance with legal and student privacy standards.
- S.Tracey-Calash asked about decreases on page 18, lines 39-40, for the principal and assistant principal at CES. The decrease reflects a longevity payment made last year under the contract for 10 years of service, which will not recur this year. Additionally, the prior assistant principal was at a higher step than the current assistant principal and also had a longevity payment of five years.
- S.Tracey-Calash asked about the reduction on page 18, line 44. The staff member at CES works part-time, four hours per day, which accounts for the reduction.
- S.Tracey-Calash asked about the reduction on page 18, line 57. Office Professionals were offered the option to reduce their work year, and this individual at CES elected to work fewer summer hours. The position is now 216 days, resulting in reduced wages due to a shorter work year.
- S.Tracey-Calash asked about CES stipends. These include the Safe School Climate Specialist and other contractual teacher leader positions.
- C.McNeely asked whether all administrators had confirmed the FTEs reflected in their budgets, particularly in light of a previously identified discrepancy. He also asked how differences in individual contracts are verified. It was noted that the current format was agreed upon by the subcommittee last year. Superintendent Sullivan suggested reviewing the format for potential improvements next year.
- M.Millington asked about significant increases at CES on page 18, lines 9, 3, and 23. The increases are due to a lower-step employee being replaced by a higher-step employee, as well as a step increase from step 10 to step 11 in the sixth year.
- C.McNeely asked about magnet school tuition and whether the district receives state reimbursement. It was explained that the district is legally required to pay tuition for Colchester students attending magnet schools, and the tuition rates are set by the Regional Educational Service Center (RESC). The district does not receive reimbursement for magnet tuition. Students remain Colchester students, and the district continues to pay for IEP and 504 services, case manage their plans, and meet regularly with the magnet schools.

2.3. Presentation from Administrative Team on Following Budgets: General Operating Budget and Transportation

Superintendent Sullivan, USI Insurance Broker Chris Monroe and Director of Educational Operations Barillari gave their presentations on priorities.

2.4. Board Q&A on Following Budgets: General Operating Budget and Transportation

- Board members asked how the different scenarios in the presentation were developed and how the projected figures were determined. There was also discussion about whether the Board has the authority to make changes to the insurance plan. Monroe

explained that the current proposal reflects maintaining the status quo. Superintendent Sullivan indicated he would like to bring the matter to the tri-board to further evaluate the risk-reward considerations.

- The Board asked whether the school district could separate from the Town for insurance purposes. Monroe explained that while it is possible, it is generally not done and would not be advantageous from a stop-loss administration standpoint.
- There was a request to review employee insurance claims to better understand whether current claims are driving the projected costs. It was noted that there has been an increase in claims and expenses.
- The Board asked whether increasing the stop-loss threshold would affect employees' take-home pay. It was explained that any impact would be very small.
- Members asked how long it would take to rebuild a healthy reserve. It was stated that reserves would need to perform at projected levels and that rebates beyond what is currently built into the budget would help. Rebuilding the reserve would require a favorable claims year and disciplined budgeting to capitalize on a positive year.
- The Board asked about the implications of not having a favorable year. In that case, the district may need to pivot back to a fully insured model, which would be significantly more expensive. Other options discussed included joining the state partnership plan or moving fully insured, which would reduce flexibility and local control. It was noted that insurance costs are increasing by approximately 12–15% annually, making it critical to enter the year with a properly funded budget and a disciplined plan to rebuild reserves.
- There was discussion of a waiver process. It was noted that the district would need to determine what proposal to bring forward. The process would mirror language in the teachers' contract, requiring engagement with the teachers' union for approval before approaching other bargaining units. This will be discussed more at the next workshop.
- Board members asked about bus runs versus additional bus runs. The increase reflected in the budget represents the contractual percentage increase. Additional bus runs refer to orientation routes for students to learn their bus routes, as well as coverage for the 21 regular bus routes and days when other districts that our students attend are in session and Colchester is not.
- Transportation reimbursement was discussed, including mileage reimbursement for Superintendent Sullivan and Assistant Superintendent Kuckel, and other staff members.
- Athletic buses were also discussed. These costs are billed separately and are reflected within individual school budgets.

Motion by: M.Millington
Motion to recess
Second: N.Nelson
Roll Call: All in favor
Vote: Motion carried

The meeting recessed at 8:42 PM
The meeting returned from recess at 8:56 PM

- C.Rivers asked about page 49, certified daily substitutes and classroom daily substitutes. The amounts were determined based on trend data reflecting an increase in staff absences and the need to ensure adequate coverage. The adjustment represents an effort to budget more accurately rather than overspending those line

items during the year.

- G.Gilberti asked about page 49, lines 9 and 10. It was clarified that Finance Associate 1 is Accounts Payable and Finance Associate 2 is Payroll.
- C.McNeely asked about page 49, line 11, including when the individual was hired, the job description, and responsibilities. It was clarified that this is not a new position. The district had an employee leave, and when the position was reposted, it was reduced to fewer hours to achieve budget savings.
- N.Nelson asked about page 49, line 13, regarding the School Resource Officer (SRO), and how that role differs from other security positions in the schools. The SRO is a Colchester Police Department officer assigned through an agreement between the Town and the schools. The SRO is primarily stationed at Bacon Academy but attends activities at all schools as needed. School Security Officers are Board of Education employees. There are currently two SSOs at CES, two at BA, one at JJIS, and one at WJ.
- C.Rivers asked about page 50, line 44, regarding payment for retiring teachers' sick leave payouts. It was noted that eight teachers are retiring this year, resulting in the associated payout costs.
- M.Millington asked about the stipends for Central Office staff. These stipends are for the Director of Safety and the Head Nurse.
- N.Nelson asked about professional development for general education teachers and where those costs are reflected. It was clarified that teacher professional development is accounted for within the curriculum budget.
- M.Millington asked about the Munis contract and whether it is shared with the Town. The district's portion of the shared contract is $70,000.
- C.McNeely asked about page 50, line 64, regarding the administrative retreat. The administrative team participates in a structured professional development retreat, which is common practice. The team typically works with a New England college or university partner to align district priorities, ensure consistency around data and goals, receive leadership training, and review legislative updates. The retreat takes place over a couple of days in the summer and is designed for principals, directors, and Central Office administrators. It is one of the few professional development opportunities specifically designed for the leadership team rather than facilitated by them.
- S.Tracey-Calash asked about additional professional development for Central Office staff, including the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent. These opportunities are largely state and regional conferences, such as those offered by New England Association of School Superintendents (NEASS) and Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS). Participation ensures awareness of legislative developments and other state-level updates that could directly impact the district.
- C.McNeely asked about page 50, line 82, regarding membership dues and fees. It is essentially just the membership association fees and what those memberships provide to the district.
- C.McNeely asked about page 49, lines 1–3, and why the figures differ from last year's contract. The differences reflect changes within specific line items that the Board approved after the budget was made.

2.5. Citizen Q&A on Following Budgets: JJIS, WJJMS, CES, General Operating and Transportation

- Molly Anderson, Norwich Avenue, asked about salaries that were adjusted and whether certain individuals received a double or higher raise, while others in similar categories

were not adjusted. She also asked about the Associate Principal salary and the SRBI Paraeducator salary. Clarification was provided that the Associate Principal at JJIS is partially funded through Title I. The SRBI paraeducator position was not eliminated but shifted from an intervention line to a special education paraeducator line based on student needs.

- Michael Dubreuil, Woodbine Road, via Zoom, asked about the Superintendent's salary, noting that while the contract was negotiated and executed, it did not come before the full Board for approval. It was explained that the Board previously voted to authorize the Board Chair to negotiate the Superintendent's salary, consistent with past practice.
- **Iustina (Babs) McNeely, Windham Avenue, via Zoom**, asked about salary increases and the process by which raises were determined, particularly with the Health Reserve in such a bad place. She asked what would prevent similar decisions regarding pay increases in the future instead of directing funds toward addressing budget concerns. It was stated that decisions were made based on the information available at the time, and that the district is continuing to review and unpack prior processes to ensure improved oversight and decision-making moving forward.

2.6. Board Q&A on Following Budgets: JJIS, WJJMS, CES, General Operating and Transportation

- None

3. **ADJOURNMENT**

Motion by: C.Rivers
Motion to adjourn.
Second: C.McNeely
Roll Call: All in favor
Vote: Motion carried

S.Tracey-Calash adjourned the meeting at 9:49 PM

Respectfully submitted,

AButova

Alyssa Butova
Executive Assistant to the Superintendent